

▼ JULY 15 • 1996



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See page 8



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*See Page 4 for reader comments to Is Our Voice a good name?

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Our Voice

The spare change newspaper



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page 10



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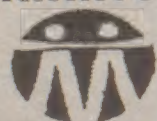
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NEWS • of the World

Initiation of the naked workers

It's been a bizarre time for initiation rituals. In North Yorkshire, England a police recruit was forced to walk around naked with a lost property tag tied to his penis. "It's the longest arm of the law I've ever seen," gasped one eyewitness. In India, meanwhile, a man spent five years working naked with a pair of nan breads taped to his buttocks. Gupthal Marath's ordeal began the day he joined a metal-cutting company in Armur. "When I arrived they made me strip nude and tape nans to my bottom," explained Mr Marath, 31. "They said it was

protection from flying metal, which seemed perfectly reasonable." The joke was only supposed to last for a day, but was unwittingly perpetuated by Mr Marath himself. The next morning, without being told to, he removed his clothes and strapped on his nans, continuing thus for five years until he was saved by a visiting inspection team. "This is not uncommon," admitted one inspector. "Last year we found a lathe operator with mango chutney in his armpits. ♦

Motorcyclist takes it out on the planes

The world of motorcycle display riding has witnessed a succession of disasters of late. In Wales, a police display team was disbanded after its members crashed into each other and broke their legs. This was nothing, however, when compared to the mishaps that have befallen Colombian stunt rider Carlos Flain of Tulua. During the course of his spectacular career Mr Flain destroyed over 200 motorcycles and accidentally killed five people, including his own mother on whom he landed after mistiming a dramatic jump over members of his family. The apogee of his career, however,

was reached at an agricultural fair where he had been employed to leap over 16 tractors. After meticulously planning the stunt, the mad motorcyclist had roared up a ramp and into the air. Unfortunately, however, the event organizers had failed to warn him of the low-level formation flying display by the local micro-light airplane club which was at that very moment passing across the fair ground, and into which a horrified Mr Flain crashed mid-air, killing himself and three pilots. "Next year we'll stick with folk dances and chinchilla racing," said the local mayor. ♦

World's rarest owl quite tasty

Bird lovers have been having a hard time of it, too. In Holland, the chairman of the Bird Protection Society suffered concussion after a dead goose plunged from the sky and hit him on the head. "Last year a Guatemalan lovebird bit off my ear lobe," he admitted. Equally unfortunate was British ornithologist Philip Ball, who trekked into the Nigerian outback to look at a Rufous Fishing Owl. The RFO is one of the rarest owls in existence and Mr Ball set off immediately when he heard that one had been sighted in the Edo region of Nigeria.

After a hazardous journey he was met by a local village who laid on a sumptuous feast in his honour. "There was a lovely stew," he recalled. "It had a deliciously thick gravy and some very tender meat. I had five helpings it was so tasty. Only when I asked what it was and the chief flapped his arms and made a hooting sound did I realize the truth." Having eaten the purpose of his visit Mr Ball took some photos of hippos and then returned home. "Next time I'll take a packed lunch," he said. ♦

Eggplants prove the existence of God

Once again it's all been happening in the world of eggplants. In Bolton, England, a solanum melangena was found with its seeds spelling the word "Allah" inside. "This clearly shows that God exists," said one local cleric. In France, meanwhile, there has been a spate of bank robberies by a man dressed as a giant eggplant. The first was, apparently, in Marseille, where the eggplant burst into a bank with a shotgun and ordered staff to hand over the money. "He had purple skin and stiff green leaves,"

recalled cashier Anton Semar. "I said 'Are you serious?' but he screamed 'No, I'm an aubergine!' and fired his gun." Terrified staff gave the villainous vegetable all the money they had, whereupon he deposited a single -real-aubergine on the counter and left. There have since been three further incidents, although police are no nearer catching the culprit. "We are urging the public to be on the lookout for heavily armed spring vegetables," said one officer. ♦

Above articles compiled by Paul Sussman in *The Big Issue*, London England's street-sold magazine.

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VENDOR • Profile

PHOTO • TOM HIND

Matt LaPerle

BY TOM HIND

Eight months ago he was homeless for a while, living on the streets. "The experience taught me I had to become focused if I was to get ahead and make a life for myself," says vendor Matt LaPerle. "That's where **Our Voice** entered my life as an option to provide for myself.

"I sell the newspaper daily from 1 to 6 pm at 103 Street and 118th Avenue, (in Edmonton)" says Matt. "In the morning, weekdays, I go on an active job search, looking for a chef's position. But the competition is fierce and so far I haven't been able to click. I'll do labour jobs or odd jobs for people. But I'd prefer to find something in my chosen profession."

Matt started selling **Our Voice** in March, and now three months later he reports that sales are providing him "with enough walking around money to afford small luxuries like food," which he has a penchant for, being a NAIT-trained chef. Matt finished his two-year course last year.

"My specialities are preparing seafood dishes, desserts, pastries," says Matt. "I particularly like making lemon meringue pies."

Matt is sure his persistence will eventually get him into a cooking career.

Quiet-spoken, optimistic, and dependable, Matt presents himself as a sincere young man with a mission in

life: to better his present position.

Though born and raised in Edmonton, schooling at St. Joseph's High, Matt is well-travelled, having visited Washington, D.C. Portland, Oregon, Redding, California and Salt Lake City.

"Travelling to different places widened me up," he says. "Many lifestyles are out there. Travel helped me decide to become a chef."

Matt has other creative sides too. He likes listening to music and bike riding and exercising. He's also a budding poet. "I'm a romantic," he confides. "Though I'm a solitary person, I've been looking for that special lady to read poetry to. Outside my solitude, I also like to visit with family and friends."

"I like talking to and meeting new people I run into when selling **Our Voice**. People are really nice to me, and I appreciate their kindness and friendliness," he says.

Any readers with job tips for Matt may reach him later afternoons or early evenings at 471-6371. ♦

The people who bring you **OUR VOICE**

This newspaper exists because of the efforts of the people who sell it to you on the street, the vendors. For our vendors **OUR VOICE** is a job that helps them to be independent and self-employed. Each issue we highlight one of our vendors in Vendor Profile to let you know a little bit about the people who bring you **OUR VOICE**. ♦

OUR VOICE
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OUR VOICE VENDOR'S CODE

- I will be sober at all times while working
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- I will vend only in areas that are authorized

All **OUR VOICE** vendors are required to wear an ID badge (contents above) and abide by a code of conduct. If you have any comments about our vendors, phone our distribution manager in your city (see page 5).

Is Our Voice a good name?

Many readers called in to respond to our question about the name of the paper, and they were quite divided on the question. Changing the name of the paper was a hard call, and our readers had many differing opinions.

"Street Times" one person suggested.

"I vote No for the name Our Voice. It doesn't sound right. It's like an echo. My husband is voting no too."

"I'm not totally in favour of the current name Our Voice, I think it's a little bit plaintive..."

"I think it is (good), but it depends on the perspective of the people selling the paper, who made the decision if it was a collective decision."

"To be honest with you when I saw someone standing on the corner selling a paper called Our Voice I thought for sure it was someone's propaganda and it would make me stay away from it."

"I am a senior and I buy your paper on a regular basis. I think Our Voice is an excellent name. I've had a hard day, I'll tell you. Your Toilet Humour and Sweet

and Tough Kisses stories really made my day. Keep it up."

"I find it feels better to buy something with the money I contribute. It was the wrong thing to do,



I don't feel it portrays what you are trying to accomplish. Why hide what you are trying to accomplish, by calling it Our Voice, which is meaningless. It doesn't say anything for anything. You'd be much better off calling it Spare Change."

"I've had a number of involvements with other support organizations for street people. The Our Voice name doesn't speak to me as clearly as the Spare Change name. In a way it doesn't really

matter what the name is, once you get to understand what it's about and the individuals on the street."

"A name that's more clear about what the objective is might be worthwhile. I'd suggest a subheading: Global Street Sense: A people newspaper in support of understanding and change for the economically marginalized members of our society."

"I think it's Not a good name, I thought of others."

"Our Voice is a good name, I really miss the horoscope that you used to have in it."

"Yes."

"I don't like it. Your original name Spare Change was a good one and got your message across."

"No problem with the Our Voice, I understand your reason."

"Yes. Keep up the good work."

"Yes, I like Our Voice. I'm always glad to have the newspaper."

"Yes I think Our Voice is a good name. Perhaps Our Voice says more what you have to want to reflect to the public. That's my opinion."

Thank you to everyone who phoned in. We'll be publishing further comments on the Talking Back questions in every issue of **Our Voice**. ♦

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The Path of Self Destruction

by Gwen Randall-Young

No one knows for sure what memories he carried from those times in the womb when his drunken Father would physically and emotionally abuse his Mother. Or from the many times he was startled by his Father's angry voice, as his Mother clutched him tightly to her. He wouldn't understand the wetness of her tears as they fell on his cheek while being breastfed. But from early on, he knew fear, and the tightness in his body seemed a natural state of being.

There were times of laughter and fun, when his Dad was sober, but they were few and far between. Mostly he never knew what to expect, and so he dreaded the time that his Father would come home. Fear and sadness became intertwined, as he lived with the unpredictable rages that thundered through his consciousness and became embedded in his memory. Even as a young boy, he would spend hours waiting in the car while his Dad drank in the bar. Then there was the terrifying drive home, and more than once, they hit the ditch.

As he grew, he spent as much time away from home as possible. He felt safety and some measure of acceptance with his friends. He began drinking early, and heavily. Partly, it was about doing what the others were doing, and partly it was a way of silently expressing anger and revenge over not having a real Father. He left home early, working

out of town, where the only after work entertainment was the local bar.

He married the first girl he fell in love with. It's what she wanted, and there was no reason not to. They were very different from one another, but love was enough. Or was it? The children came and he continued to drink. He spent much of their childhood passed out on the couch. Even now, he has no idea of the hours they spent cowering in their rooms. Or of their Mother's constant efforts to shoo them out of his way. He has no recollection of when the love died, and his wife gave up on him.

Finally he quit drinking. He began the long road to recovery. Slowly he has come to understand how the pieces of his life all fit together to create the sad story. There is a pride and contentment in sobriety, and finally, self respect.

His wife has remarried. His children struggle with their own dysfunctions. He is, still, alone. They all carry the scars, handed down through the generations. They are the luckier ones. They have had time to salvage something of their relationships to one another. The children soon will marry. More children will come. Perhaps this time, it can be good.



Gwen Randall-Young is a Chartered Psychologist and author of **Dancing Soul: The Voice of Spirit Evolving** and **Echoes Through Time: A Message of Healing for Men**.

Gwen's books are available at:

Vancouver: Banyen Books, Serendipity's Back Yard, Misty River Bookstore

Calgary: A Woman's Place Bookstore, Coles, Smith Books, Classic Books, New Age Bookstore and Self-Connection Books

Edmonton: Coles, Smith Books, The Book Company, Greenwoods, Audrey's, Self Heal Herbal Centre & Scents of Wonder, Waltz of Flowers, Listen International (Westin Concourse Level), Ascendant, Akashik & Orlando Books.

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Last summer my son cut his foot...

I was across the lake, fishing, at the time. I heard a car horn, saw people waving frantically, and picked out the faces of my daughter and all the other children, except his. My heart was in my mouth as I paddled hard back across the lake.

It was a big cut, but I could see quickly that he actually would survive. Had to take him to emergency though, and he did scream piteously as the doctor injected the freezing into the sole of his foot. I had to hold him down, which wasn't very pleasant at all. Be brave, I said, but the doctor said I'd probably be hollering too, the bottom of one's foot is very sensitive.

It was pretty painful, and it all started so innocently. He was having a great time, wading up a little creek with the gang. It seemed idyllically safe to me, adult friends were nearby and I felt okay about going across the lake to fish.

But all it took was one shard of clear glass to get him screaming and his playmates into frantic action to deal with the emergency. Someone's carelessly pitched bottle, perhaps from seven or twenty years ago, did it. The kids only found the one sharp chunk of glass, too, just one.

It seemed a shame to have to yell at all those kids, "Didn't I tell you to keep your shoes on?" Summer fun wading barefoot in the creek, how could they resist? I don't want them to have to worry. I want my children to have that freedom.

Even before I had kids, I would often kneel down to pick sharp glass pieces and get them out of the grass, or off the sidewalk. There are wickedly sharp spears of brown, white, green glass everywhere. "Do I have to

wear my shoes, Dad?" Well maybe not, just to the swimming pool. But there on the sidewalk a smashed beer bottle gets the kids tiptoeing daintily around.

I think I was twelve or so when my two best friends and I came across some cases of empty beer bottles during one of our countryside rambles. We had new slingshots, so we set the bottles up on posts and let fly. Quite a carnage we observed when it was all over, and we were dismayed by what we had done. Even if we

cleaned for hours we wouldn't get all that glass. We struck a pact right there to never wantonly break bottles again.

Sharp glass is just one of those little hazards that face our children in life, like speeding cars, cancer-causing chemicals in food, benzene compounds in the water or, these days,

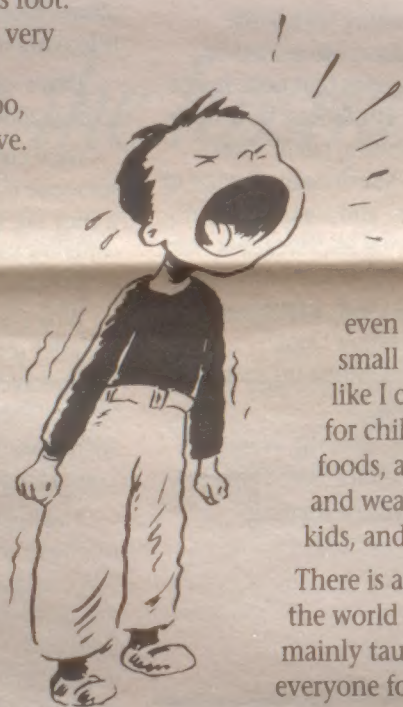
even sunshine. Picking broken glass is a very small thing that I can do that makes me feel like I can make the world a little better, safer for children. Driving less, buying natural foods, avoiding use of solvents and chemicals and wearing a hat are some others. It's for my kids, and all kids, that I do these little things.

There is a lot to taking care of the bits of glass in the world today. It certainly is not the way we are mainly taught to live, which is to get ahead, everyone for themselves.

But we do share a common home, a small planet and there are many sharp edges we can all work on a bit, for our families, our friends and even for people we may never meet.

Kneeling down to pluck glass pieces is tending to the garden-home of our world. There are many, many more small things people do that are just like that. ♦

KEITH WILEY



Tough stories, happy stories

Edmonton writer Fiona McNair found out just how devastating those VLT demons can be and tells us about it in this issue's feature on the lure of machine gambling. Young Calgary writer Yvonne Dyck got a much happier tale about the Food Not Bombs group who are now trying to find a place where they will be allowed to give away their vegetarian meals. Calgary editor Barbara Lauber followed up on it and the stories are on pages 10 and 11. Ron Murdoch sells Our Voice in Saskatoon. On the back cover this issue he tells of the lives of families who have jobs, but still find it tough to get ahead. Michael Walters selected the poems again for page 13, Deanna Douglas did the high-tech movie review. Linda Dumont drew us more cartoons, including the inscrutable Soupline Bob. Chris Norgaard looks into the work for welfare programs in the story on page 7. Andy Ramcharan and Brian G. again contributed to Words on the Street, Susan Andrews brings us another crossword puzzle and Edmonton's scrappy freelancer, Tom Hind did this issue's Vendor Profile. Darren Domskey offers his outside-in look at what he thinks selling this newspaper might be like on page 12.

Welcome to new Calgary editor

Our Voice has hired its first regional editor, Barbara Lauber, in Calgary. Her job will be to increase the Calgary content in the paper. More Calgary stories will benefit Calgary Our Voice vendors by helping to increase local interest.

Our Voice is looking for volunteer writers, would-be writers, and people with ideas for stories in Calgary. The paper pays an honorarium for contributions, but the real pay-off is helping people in need. Since it began in 1994, Our Voice has given full and part-time employment to about 1200 people in Edmonton and Calgary.

We rely on our writers and contributors to make this possible. They bring street people's issues alive for our readers. We also need short pieces for the "Words on the Street" column.

If you have a tip or a good idea for a story, or want to write it yourself, in Calgary call Barbara at 221-8790, or Keith Wiley at 424-0624, 1-800-882-5954.

Cameras or computers to contribute?

Do you have an old camera or a used computer taking up space? The Calgary office of Our Voice urgently needs a working camera and computers for our writers to use. Please call 221-8790 if you can donate either of these items.

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Our Voice
The spare change newspaper

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OUR VOICE is published to provide an income opportunity for economically marginalized people in our society while communicating about their issues to the public.

For advertising rates and information, please contact Steve Rodda of SMRT Consulting at 944-1466

OUR VOICE welcomes your contribution. Letters sent to the editor are assumed to be for publication, unless otherwise indicated. OUR VOICE welcomes written submissions, particularly those on IBM or Mac compatible computer disk, cartoons, photographs or artwork. OUR VOICE cannot accept responsibility

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WORDS • On the Street

Bissell basement blend; music and coffee

BY ANDY RAMCHARAN

Three and a half years and still going. The coffee house held in Edmonton's Bissell Centre is where you will find people playing music and singing songs about their lives. It's an atmosphere of encouragement and laughter and a joy of sharing.

Originally musicians from outside the neighbourhood came to play, maybe not realizing the long-term impact of hope and encouragement to disheartened folks. The coffee house now is an opportunity for local musicians to share their creative talent with the rest of the community. It's held on the second Tuesday, every other month. On the evening I attended recently, June 11th, the hosts were from the band, "Third from the Truth", Rick Guthrie, Keith Rowe and Bruce Fox.

Dave Taylor opened the evening with some finger-pickin' tunes. Doug Carlson was joined by Russell Bone and Greg for his songs that poke fun at life and broken dreams. Local TV stations have done features on Doug and his promising talent. Don Sauve sang the blues and Phil Martin sang "Living in love with the common people" and some children's favourites that were well-received by the young ones in the audience.

Bruce Fox joined the line-up with a fabulous rendition of "Knocking on Heaven's Door". Keith Rowe on guitar and Rick Guthrie on snare and bongo drums closed the evening.

I involved myself personally with the event, assuming the role of sound operator. Sure I got some "feedback", but I rather enjoyed the evening.

Youth gangs and dealing

BY BRIAN G.

I just finished watching a news broadcast on youth gangs. They had all these suggestions on how to stop the violence. They are going to set up a Youth Crime Stoppers, set up programs in schools and have longer stints in jail.

These solutions are not going to stop the problems. We kids do not rat on each other and jails do not scare us. So how do you stop it? Simple. Jobs, jobs, jobs. Jobs for kids already involved and education and prevention for younger kids.

The way I see it, I have the skills to get a job that will pay me only \$8 an hour at most. The problem is I can make \$64 in an hour selling drugs, so why would I work eight hours? I don't expect some guy to come up to me and give me a job paying me \$50,000 a year. But when I apply for grants to go to school, I should be able to get them. They denied us the grants.

I think I joined a gang just to have something to belong to. It sounds like a stereotype, but the guys in my crew became my family. I couldn't go home, but I could always go to my friends. I realize the gangs are not a positive environment, but on the street there are not many positive things going for you anyway.

I do regret the shit we have done to some people. But you do what you need to do to survive.

I recently had a confrontation with a preacher man. He told us to follow God. We told him life isn't that simple on the street. He asked us how we felt about the people who get f**ked up on the dope. I told him, someone is going to make that money, why not us?

I do have a problem the way it is going though. Little kids robbing each other for a pair of shoes. That's going too far. Are there solutions? Yeah, of course there are. Education and prevention is very important. Kids don't see the f**ked up shit until they are already on the street. They see us walking around smoking blunts, drinking beer and partying seven days a week. They don't see the violence, the robbing, the stealing. They don't feel the paranoia of always looking over your shoulder because someone is looking to get even with you.

That's what the kids who are 11 and 12 now need to hear about gang violence.

They don't need some cop telling them to tell someone if they see a crime. They already know that if they rat, they'll lose their friends. It's time for a different solution. It's time to show kids the mysteries of teen violence. It's time to scare them straight.

Why are my thoughts concerned with who's coming after me? We refer to crime as a game. The penalties involved are not just sitting out. You can get really hurt. People will stab you or break your legs for selling on the wrong corner. Business is business and you must protect your customer base.

Making money is easy in the beginning. You start selling drugs, just to cover your debt. The more you sell, the closer you get with your connection. But the problems start when you start to use the dope and then you owe the connection. If you don't smoke, you are fine. But you smoke a spliff and you start to cut into profit. There are times you sell to just break even. It's a cool lifestyle in the beginning, but in the end you are always in debt. People come looking for you. It's not only me, it happens to everyone. In the last year I have buried one of my friends and four of my friends are now in the Edmonton Max. I know a lot of people in remand centres and a lot of people in rehab. Everyone will say the same thing. It was fun in the beginning and the end is always really f**ked up. The police kick in your door and bust you. Some guy comes looking for money you owe. Or you just come close to death. Mothers lose their babies to the welfare system.

I think back to when I was a kid, watching the dope dealers back then, thinking how cool they were. I knew what I wanted to be. Now they are in jail, or just getting out. You can get away with it for a long time, but everyone gets caught in the long run.

It's a crazy lifestyle. I almost had my leg broken over a ten dollar bag of weed. I sold some dope on somebody else's grass. The big no no in this business. I have yet to get shot or stabbed, but that's only because I always have my boys watching my back. I watch too. But I know it's coming to me. It happens to everyone. We will run into a group of guys tougher than us. They will do to us what we have done to others. It's just one vicious cycle. ♦

Working for welfare

BY CHRIS NORGAARD

"People who collect social assistance are lazy and unmotivated."

This myth has been proven false in Alberta's workfare program, ACE. Welfare recipients, many of whom put in full weeks of work as willing volunteers, are taking full-time positions at minimum wage rather than collect assistance cheques.

ACE (Alberta Community Employment) grants provide funding for non-profit organizations to hire people on welfare, paying wages for a period of six months. After six months, the person qualifies for Unemployment Insurance (UIC).

onto UIC., then, if there is still no employment, it's back on the system. One is eligible for only one ACE grant, so even if you do an exemplary job, you are laid off after six months.

Another question is whether this is part of the provincial government's deficit reducing plan, shunting people from provincial funding through social services to the federal payroll on unemployment insurance. When government statistics claim that welfare rolls are down by fifty percent, how much of that is due to the work for welfare program, and shifting onto UIC?

Finding employment after ACE may prove difficult. Some employers are hiring ACE workers to fill their need for employees, so if you are not on welfare, you simply don't have the right qualifications for the job. Some hire an ACE worker with the intent of using the six months as a training period, then continuing

Exploding the laziness myth

For non-profit organizations, the ACE grants are a real boon. Leslie Regelous at Edmonton's Mustard Seed Street Church reports, "We have between eight and twelve ACE employees at a time, replacing them with new staff as their ACE contracts expire. It has been my experience that they are hard-working employees who are just thankful to be working. We are always sorry to see them leave at the end of six months."

ACE workers at the Mustard Seed are responsible for preparing and serving soup for the daily lunch program, the clothing room, deliveries, cleaning, and running the drop in. The Inner City Food Bank which serves 1000 people per week is also staffed mainly by ACE employees and volunteers. Many who have been hired worked as volunteers prior to their ACE employment.

Since the welfare cutbacks, increasing numbers of people have been relying more and more heavily on support services from inner city ministries, food banks, and other helping agencies. The ACE grants help to service this overwhelming need. Most ministries operate on a shoestring budget and, as the economy continues to degrade, their budgets have been cut down as well.

Since a single person on welfare receives only \$394 a month, the minimum wage of about \$850 per month is a real boost.

For some, working on the ACE program means an increased income and freedom from the hassles of the social services. For others, those supporting families, the welfare system is still necessary to top up the ACE earnings.

Unfortunately, the program only provides short term employment. After six months, it's

the employment, but this is the exception rather than the rule.

A major advantage to working as an ACE worker is that you can moonlight to top up your wages, and there is no need to declare extra income and no deduction to your cheque.

ACE workers express mixed feelings about their jobs.

"I'm working for peanuts," Jack says, "If I could get a job on road construction I could make some real money."

"I found it really stressful," another ACE employee said, "If I had to do it over again, I wouldn't. I was being topped up by welfare, then had a waiting period to go on UIC, and I find that living on UIC, and still receiving welfare makes budgeting hard."

Others are just happy to be receiving a regular paycheque without having to fill out a report card. It's more money than the single allowance on welfare, and if you have another part-time job, such as selling **Our Voice**, you can top up your wages.

Unfortunately, for most, six months go by all too quickly. They face an uncertain future. Employment prospects are not good even with a work record of six months to show to prospective employers. Even so, ACE workers have exploded yet another myth, that of the lazy, unmotivated welfare recipient who prefers "Supports For Independence" to work.

People are more than willing to work if given a fair chance. ♦

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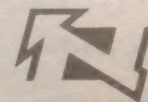
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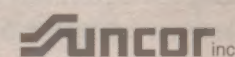
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It's the crack cocaine of gambling and it has taken Alberta by storm. With their bright lights and annoying little tunes, video lottery terminals (VLTs) have won their way into hundreds of bars, restaurants and casinos across the province.

Raking in millions of dollars per year for the provincial government, VLTs seem like a great way to raise some money - but many are now asking if it is really worth it.

"The devastation that is going to be caused as a result of these machines, the monetary value (earned) will never make up for the lives, families and loss of livelihood that are just being eaten up by those machines," says Allison, a 25 year-old college student.

A recovering gambling addict, Allison fed more than \$15,000 from two separate student loans in 1993/94 into VLT machines.

"In the end I was able to keep my furniture and my cats but not much more," says Allison.

And she says she has lost more than just money to the machines. Her \$250 a day habit also destroyed her marriage and took away her house, leaving her with a badly damaged self-esteem.

"The machines never talked to me and told me how bad my life was and that everything I worked for was going down the drain. They didn't care if I was fat or ugly, thin, old or young, they just sat silent, never telling me how much money I was spending, and I never even felt any guilt until I was done," says Allison.

"It is more powerful than drugs in a sense because you don't have to feel anything," she continues.

As she gets ready to celebrate her one year anniversary of abstinence she remembers the day she returned home late from a night of gambling and found the Yellow Pages phonebook her husband had left open on the kitchen table. He had highlighted Gamblers' Anonymous for her.

"I kept thinking, 'Why can't you stop (gambling), you are an intelligent person,'" says Allison.

"There is so much shame involved with this addiction. Like any other addiction it doesn't just involve you", she says, "I was at rock bottom, I couldn't go anywhere else."

She still finds it difficult to deal with the pain she has caused other people.

Marcy Dibbs, a consultant for problem gambling at AADAC (Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Centre) warns that the suicide rate for problem gamblers is higher than with any other type of addict.

AADAC has seen calls to its provincial gambling hotline double in the past year with 60% of the calls regarding VLTs. They have also begun building a second treatment centre in Southern Alberta to try to meet the incredible demand for programs for addicts.

"There is an exciting, physiological rush that mesmerizes the gambler," says Dibbs. She says the instant gratification found when playing VLTs is a big draw for people looking to escape reality or add a little action to their lives.

That was how it happened for Allison. In the beginning it was just quick fun...a way to blow a few

bucks and kill some time. But eventually she found herself driving home from work and ending up each night in a bar plugging a VLT.

Although she considers herself to be an honest person, Allison says she lied, manipulated and even stole from her employer to feed her habit, always intending to pay it back once she won really big.

Of course that time never came- although she says she had convinced herself it would.

"Ironically enough, at the end I continued gambling to try and escape my financial difficulties. But the amount I gambled was so phenomenally high I could never win it back," says Allison.

Just like Allison, Jan (not her real name) was waiting for the big win that never came.

A 53 year old homemaker and mother of two grown sons, Jan estimates she lost more than \$4000 in less than six months of VLT gambling.

After 20 years of playing bingo two or three times a week, she started to play VLTs and soon was unable to control her new "hobby."

She would rush through her daily housework to have more time playing the VLTs. After coming home to cook her husband supper she says she would often lie and say she was going to visit a friend, only to end up back on her machine for a few more hours, before coming home and taking a sleeping pill to erase the bells and whistles from her head... a cycle she would repeat the next day.

"In the end I was very sick, emotionally and physically. You are not yourself at all. You are just like a zombie and all you can think about are VLTs," says Jan.

The toll on her family seems to be difficult to talk about as she recalls how much time she spent gambling instead of with her children. The disease has been particularly hard on her husband, who initially thought she just lacked willpower.

"It has been very embarrassing for him and he often had to cover for me with my kids and when my friends would call for me," says Jan.

"He thought I was just being stupid," she says. Retirement plans have had to be put on hold as travel is out of the question for Jan at the moment.

"He has to put up with all of this counselling and stuff I have to go to instead of being able to enjoy his retirement," she says.

Jan is new to Gamblers' Anonymous and she has tried to fill up her time with volunteer work and recreational sports. Since joining GA this past April,



One armed bandits

A video lottery terminal that was feeling cranky recently printed out this report form showing how much money it had gone through over a 476 day period.

\$391,000 in loonies went in to the machine, or \$822.50 every day!

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total profit, on
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over \$108,000
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[illegible]

she has managed to abstain from any type of gambling, with the exception of a few slips.

But she is taking no chances.

Although she has managed the finances for her family for more than 31 years, she has signed over all of the bank accounts to her husband, who pays the bills and gives her a small, weekly allowance.

Jan says this change has been "difficult- but necessary."

Allison also has had to make many changes to her daily routine.

"I am not like Joe Average and I will never be," says Allison, "I am an addict."

To lower the risks of indulging her addiction, she doesn't carry more than bus fare in her purse, doesn't buy lottery tickets, go to bingo or to a casino, or even place friendly wagers with friends.

Both women now avoid establishments with VLT machines and attend GA meetings regularly. Although both say they accept responsibility for their choices, they wonder if VLTs hadn't been so accessible they would have still gotten hooked.

"There is a time limit to bingo, but not really for VLTs and they are everywhere," says Jan.

She is critical of the government and its decision to increase the numbers of VLTs.

"It is just greed, pure and simple. They don't care at all what it is doing to families and kids," she says.

"I wish I would have never even tried it once," ♦

JUST HOW BIG IS THE BIG BOOMING BUSINESS?

- The 6200 VLT machines in Alberta will generate more than 500 million dollars this year.
- Less than \$1.7 million of that will go to treatment, education and research into gambling addictions.
- Annually, \$26-28 million goes towards drug and alcohol addictions.
- More than 60% of the calls to AADAC's crisis/referral line are about gambling problems.
- This AADAC line has seen its calls jump from 1473 calls to 2702 this year.

WHERE CAN YOU GO FOR HELP?

- AADAC's 24 hour Gambling Help Line, crisis intervention, personal/group counselling, referrals 1-800-665-9676 (and no, they don't give out winning numbers for the lottery)

GAMBLERS' ANONYMOUS

- Canadian Foundation on Compulsive Gambling (Alberta Chapter): 461-1259
- The average Albertan spends \$1,427 per year on gambling. Ten years ago it was only \$382.
- Manitoba is leading the way to decrease the number of VLTs.
- Alberta just last week announced the addition of 200 more VLTs designated for use in new aboriginal-owned casinos.



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OUR

VOICE

JULY 15

1996

Calgary young people get out

BY YVONNE DYCK

"We've hardly spent any money at all on it," Serena says. A glance around the grassy area where the Food Not Bombs banner is flying reveals close to a hundred people, all of them eating and having enough food. For many, this is the biggest meal they will get this week.

Some Calgary kids began cooking meals to serve for free in Calgary's Olympic Plaza.

"Our priority is just to serve food. That's all that really matters," says Grant, one of the cooks. "There are so many people in this city who, whether homeless are not, just can't afford to buy food. Times are so hard—we have this food for anyone who is hungry. We are not going to turn down someone because of their race or religion—this is open to anyone."

"Even people who are nasty!" Serena jokes.

The banner they fly bears the slogan—Food Not Bombs. A student-founded organization with roots in the United States, the group's sole mission is simple—feed people.

Serena, 21, heard about Food Not Bombs through a friend, and gathered the names of people who would help them in their effort to stop the snarl of hungry stomachs. "And so it was just born." Serena smiles, brushing a strand of long black hair from her face. Although the Calgary Food Not Bombs was initiated and is mainly run by Serena, she refuses to take all of the credit. "Me and Shannon talked about it, and Grant, Mark and Casey. We all started it."

The funding for Food Not Bombs comes through donations. "The food we get is donated by stores—food that would be thrown away or otherwise wasted," Grant explains. Casey, 20, adds, "We had a benefit show where we raised money to buy pots and the initial spices. Everything else is volunteer work."

It does not matter to Serena, Grant, or Casey, whether their efforts go recognized or are even known by the politicians of the city. "It's not important."

Casey adds, "You go to any other food bank or service like that and you are going to get a religious spiel and if you don't believe that, then it's really insulting to you. No spiel here, this is food for the hungry, and we don't care what you look like or who you are, if you say you're hungry, then you get to eat."



▲ Serena (left) eats lunch with two other volunteers.



▲ Free food in the park courtesy of Calgary young people.

The Food Not Bombs volunteers are eating alongside everyone else. "We're all eating it too, because it's about the idea that if we don't eat it, then it will be thrown away. Thrown away food is just a crime—it should go into somebody's stomach," she adds passionately, "To throw away food is just disgusting. There should be a law against it. It's true!"

"We hope that more people will come to eat, and more people will come to volunteer. It doesn't take that much effort," Casey explains, "You spend a little time on your Sunday serving food, helping to cook, helping to clean up—whatever, you're still helping."

Serena says that one of the goals of Food Not Bombs is to raise awareness of the fact that there are homeless people and hungry people.

Casey interjects, "There are a lot of people who don't realize that. It's pretty important to bring them out into the open where people can see them. That



▲ Casey helps cook and serve food.

was sort of the point of the initial Food Not Bombs."

There are around 70 volunteers for Food Not Bombs. They range in age from 14 to 22. Grant says, "We want this to be an example for society. Around the world, people are starving. If a bunch of kids can get together in their spare time and cook up some food and feed it to people...." his voice trails off at the implications of the project.

Serena adds, "We actually do care."

to feed people

Casey: "You don't have to make huge differences in your life to make a difference. A lot of people think they can't make a difference, but they can and it's really easy."

They borrow kitchens in friends' houses to cook the food. The most concrete thing that Food Not Bombs has is a phone number and an answering machine. "What you see here is what we are." Serena indicates the cloth Food Not Bombs banner, the card table, and the jugs of juice and pots of food. Today's menu is Primavera Minestrone and lemon potato. The food is always meatless because of health concerns and also, Serena says, Food Not Bombs does not want to advocate the killing of animals. However, you don't have to be a vegetarian to enjoy the meal.

Food Not Bombs serves their meals under the sky and unprotected from the elements.

They have no plans for a winter location. "We'll cross that bridge when we come to it," Serena says. Further down the road, they would like to see the cause continue. "It's not a clique. Only the name for each group is the same. We run it as we see fit,



▲ Ken Johnson with his free food.

but anyone can join. Hopefully, there will always be people learning and passing it on."

If you want to pass on the spirit of Food Not Bombs, you can get more information by contacting Serena at (403) 251-4816. ♦

RULES FORCED FOOD NOT BOMBS OUT OF CALGARY PLAZA

The young Food Not Bombs volunteers were ordered off Calgary's Municipal Plaza recently. They stopped serving food when police warned them they could be charged under a city bylaw on use of the City Hall complex.

They were "too visible" one police officer told Food Not Bombs member Bao-nghi Nhan, 17. The group took it as a reference to their appearance in leather and camouflage clothing and Mohawk haircuts. And there was the imminent arrival of a Rotarian convention. "We want to be visible," said Nhan.

The Food Not Bombs people had been serving food in Calgary's Olympic Plaza every Sunday for two months. Concessionaires selling food in the Plaza were afraid of losing business and pressured the City to evict them. When they moved to Municipal Plaza by City Hall they were told they needed a permit. The kids tried to get a permit but were refused, said Nhan.

Not being a registered organization or charity, not having \$2 million of liability insurance, and wanting to use the Plaza EVERY Sunday were some of the reasons the permit was denied, according to City of Calgary spokesperson Brenda Polegi. She denied the Rotarian Convention had anything to do with it. Polegi questioned whether the people eating the Food Not Bombs food were truly in need. "Free ice cream would attract people, too," she said.

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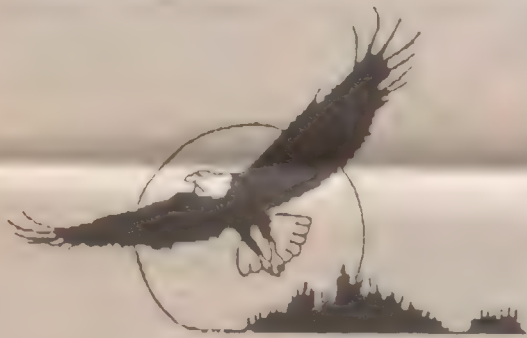
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"FICTION"

Maybe tomorrow will be better

BY DARREN DOMSKY

She sees the man on the corner holding the Our Voice in his arm, and pauses to search for a dollar. His eyes fall on her, and, excited, he offers her a paper.

"Would you like one, Ma'am?"

"Sure, why not," she laughs, forcing a smile, and dropping a loonie in his hand.

"Thank you very much."

She walks away, heading for the bus that will take her home, the paper under her arm. When she shows her pass and finds a seat, she begins to flip through the pages, reading a headline here and a column there, and thinking about the man that she purchased it from.

"I shouldn't have bought this," she thinks to herself. "All I'm doing is keeping him from going out and getting a real job. Damned bums. And a whole dollar too. I mean, who do they think they are, anyway? He wasn't even grateful. And on top of it, he's just going to go and drink it all away. No, I shouldn't have bought this. I won't make this mistake again."

She puts the paper away and forgets about it.

The little girl sits quietly in the window, watching for someone to come to the door. She has been alone at home ever since school ended, and it has been dark outside for a long time. She's worried —she knows her father has to walk a long way to get home, but he is usually home by now, and it's far too late to still be out job-hunting. Her two little brothers have already fallen asleep, and since her father is a single parent, she is the only one home to take care of them. The house is dark and dead quiet, and she can clearly hear the noise of her growling stomach. She hasn't eaten since lunch.

Suddenly she hears footsteps, and a man steps up to the door. She hears the key, the door opens, and her father walks in. She sees the beaming smile on his face, and wonders why he looks so happy. Then she sees the small bag of groceries clutched in his left arm, and she runs to go wake up her hungry brothers.

A week or two later, the same lady passes by and sees the same man again, standing on the corner and selling a new issue of Our Voice. Her face wrinkles up in disgust, and her thoughts race.

"Good-for-nothing bum, selling those damn things again. The impudence! And all he'll do is go and drink it all away again. That damned paper —it stops people like him for going out and finding a real job. Leeches, living off of society. I'm sick of it."

The man sees her, smiles in recognition, and offers her a paper.

"It's an excellent issue, Ma'am."

She can smell the filth of his unwashed clothes, and she glances at his messy hair.

"No, thank you," she says. "I'm not interested."

His smile diminishes but he speaks graciously.

"Well thanks anyways. You have a nice night."

"Yeah," she thinks silently to herself. "And you go out and find yourself a real job, you lazy bum. I won't be paying you my hard-earned money so you can just sit there on the corner, making a killing off of the charity of good-natured people. And just so you can go piss it all away, too."

The little girl is sitting again by the window, waiting for her father. It has been dark a long time, and again she is hungry. One of her brothers is sick, and isn't sleeping well.

She wonders where her father might be. The thought crosses her mind that maybe he found work, that maybe he won't have to sell papers any more to try to make ends meet. She sees him swinging the door open and telling her about his new job, and about how full the fridge will be, and about the new clothes that they'll all finally be able to buy. She can imagine his bright, beaming smile, and how happy she'll be.

Suddenly the door opens and her father slumps in. She knows immediately that there is no new job, and her optimistic thoughts vanish. She looks to see if there are any groceries, but his arms are empty. The papers haven't sold either.

"It'll be alright," he says. "Things will pick up soon."

He crouches down, cradles her in his arms, and carries her quietly to bed. Up close, she sees that he has been crying on the way home, and she knows that things will probably not pick up. Still, she pretends not to notice, and tries to enjoy her precious time with her father.

"Maybe tomorrow," she thinks, her stomach aching painfully. "Maybe tomorrow will be better." ♦

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OUR
VOICE
JULY 15
1996

POETRY

THE IMAGE MAN

1.

I am the transient image-man
parading time, space, history;
I come and go lusted by life,
Sometimes my hair twists and sweats
As the Dream realizes it is itself
Trying to inhale new breath
In the jungle jumbo-jive
alive
In worldtime actions
and caught
in the eye of a camcorder
attached to earth's axis—
An Eye believing itself
omnipotent
As it flutters shut and freezes
another frame
...for us to go ga-ga at.

2.

I am the transient, worldly
widening
My vision of how it can be
At the end of my lifedream
shown on the screen
Of cobwebs spidering outward
Into night's mid-blackness

3.

Being limited I image for God,
By God!
I image things such a personage
would see like a clear sun,
or so I think -(cogito ergo sum?)
I image at being bounced
off of mountains instead
a mother's knee
And a Summa of Life
appears in my memory,
limited only by its own perception
of Things...
things bouncing like a cupful
of atoms
In my addled mind.

4.

I am the Image-man
And you the image fixed
like a broken cloud rusting
over a field of barley;
You. Me. you-ing and me-ing,
Sometimes soldierly in action
as we burp and fart and giggle
at
gags and gigs —sometimes the unwanted
ones
That torso in ones twos and threes
And frighten us even
in the Day without shadows...
and barkings of hyena packs;
...Gags that cross times of experience
and border on joys
in a toothless woe
while a furious wind
winds up swarms of wasps
getting ready to attack
my Dream

5.

Yes. I am the image-man
Image do what image can
As a noseless moon
Sleeps in Jupiter,
As derelicts sleep in trash
Canned by a receding world.

TOM HIND

SET/RISE

At first it is a slight nod
painfully followed with saturation
of blue to orange
gray to a slumbering nausea
Casually stirred by the artificials
A non-committal yawn
Anticipating participants

I cannot partake
in the natural circadian whimsy
of nine to five
eleven to seven thirty
so I watch the sun set
and then rise.

LEONARD SALT

ALCOHOL, DRUGS & PAIN

Alcohol is my wife
drugs my mistress
They rule my life
Filling it with misery.

Drinking to ease the pain
Embracing drugs for comfort
Day after day —again and again
Turning to them for love —all in vain.

Drowning in alcohol
Flying high on drugs
Is this living —NO!
Every minute filled with strife.

Alcohol and drugs I crave
To dull the pain today
Unattainable dreams are all they gave
The pain is never far away.

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counsellors for First Nations Youth in crisis.

We thank those who have supported the walk
so far and ask for your prayers and continuing
support for the healing of a generation.

For further information or to be put on the Beads of Hope mailing list
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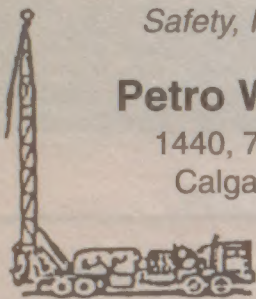
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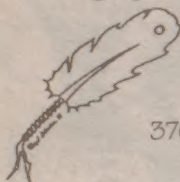
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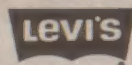
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MOVIE • Review

The Hunchback and the World Wide Web



BY DEANNA DOUGLAS

Unless you have elevated the art of media avoidance to new heights, you've probably noticed that the Disney movie machine is back. Of course, it is summer, so we expected nothing less. You may as well brace yourself now for a complete Disney line of - well - everything. I won't bore you with the obvious.

To be fair, I should preface my remarks by noting that I once wrote a research paper on literary exploitation as performed by the Disney story writers and animation crew who created *Peter Pan*. And I subscribe to a number of "magazines that strive to increase North American awareness of multinationals and their impact on our world. I trust, therefore, that you will not read any fanfare into what follows.

The promotion that has gone into the release of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, the film in question, fairly boggles the mind. My press kit includes the usual information and photo, but comes equipped with two tools that are changing the way both film critics and the general public experience movies. Although this is not the first film to employ these techniques, *Hunchback* is a good illustration of what is on the Hollywood horizon.

First off, my information is no longer limited to printed media; the Multimedia CD ROM Press Kit that came in the mail provides more images, facts, and, to be honest, entertainment value than I am accustomed to. I can look up the names, faces, and voices of everyone involved in the project with a click of my willing mouse. You can be certain that will evidence itself in what I, and every other reviewer you hear, tell you about the film.

But what is, I believe, of even greater importance, is the readily available and well promoted website at <http://www.disney.com>. As my handy Web Site Fact Sheet informs me, anyone with access to the Internet (which includes everyone with a library card) can visit the latest Disney advertising showroom free of charge. Once there, you can look up information on the people who made the picture, as well as Victor Hugo, all the characters, and even *Notre Dame* itself.

As if that wasn't enough, you can sit in on a production meeting, learn about animation, or watch the various actors speak and sing their parts. To finish off your undoubtedly long evening,

stop by the games section to make greeting cards for your friends, decorate your desktop with *Hunchback* icons, spend big bucks on some merchandise, enter a contest.... And if you get really desperate, you can even look up the theatre database to find out if it's playing at a theatre near you. All this from your trusty computer.

I am, I must admit, cynical about this natural expansion onto the Internet. Because while I will grant you that Disney is good at what they do, and there is some genuine art and entertainment value associated with their efforts, I am concerned about this turn of events. Every step that the big production companies make in this kind of direction widens the gap between their movies and those of small, independent, and international film makers.

Movies are very big business world-wide, which isn't necessarily a bad thing. But it saddens me to see the business aspect of the industry strengthened. That increase translates into a cut into the viability of the competition - smaller companies in particular - who may (or may not) have creativity a little closer to the forefront of their agenda.

Enough ranting, at least for the time being. I am now faced with a very difficult task, one that I am very surprised to have to carry out. I attended the Edmonton premiere of Disney's *Hunchback of Notre Dame*, you see. And despite all of the above, despite my general impression of most Disney animated movies, despite - well, I'm sure you're onto me by now. I liked the movie.

As a member of the **Our Voice** team I really couldn't help but like it. It spoke out firmly for the disenfranchised, the oppressed, the ignored, the hurting. The story was pretty good (you have to give Victor Hugo some credit there), the combination of traditional and computer generated animation was impressive. And it could be argued that a kid could learn a few things about both history and life over the forty or fifty hours she will likely spend watching it on video.

But what really won me over, I think, was watching Frolo plunge to his timely death. Minister of Justice Frolo tried to wipe out the underdogs of the land with every method at his disposal, but just couldn't quite do it in the time allotted. It felt just like Canadian politics.

If only Canada was part of the Disney machine. Then we, too, would be assured of a happy ending. ♦

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OUR
VOICE
JULY 15
1996

CROSSWORD • Puzzle 35

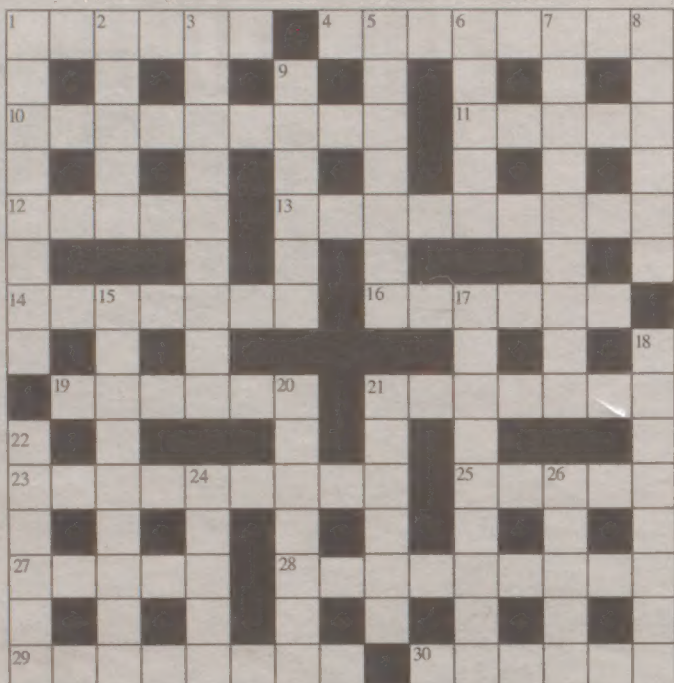
BY SUSAN ANDREWS

ACROSS

- 1 The Secret Portrait of _____ Gray (6)
- 4 Slang: cancelled, held off (8)
- 10 Mixture of one or more elements (9)
- 11 Relating to the inner forearm bone (5)
- 12 Beer was served in mugs of this measure (5)
- 13 Small sheets given out by hand (4,5)
- 14 Brown insects with pincers (7)
- 16 Explores, especially the depths? (6)
- 19 Virginal, pure (6)
- 21 Oddly (7)
- 23 Sudden inspiration or thought (5,4)
- 25 Hot damp wooden steam room (5)
- 27 Indian hierarchy system (5)
- 28 Sensors on the tongue (5,4)
- 29 Level of conspicuousness (8)
- 30 Expiated (6)

DOWN

- 1 To decode or make sense of (8)
- 2 Inhabitant of Italy's capital (5)
- 3 Science dealing with sound (9)
- 5 Tidy after making a mess (5,2)
- 6 Opposable finger of the hand (5)
- 7 Large mustache popular in the 1800's (6,3)
- 8 Most unfortunate times (6)
- 9 What tourist come to see, the _____ (6)
- 15 Practice prior to a performance (9)
- 17 Very uncomfortable (9)
- 18 Avoided by an alternate route (8)
- 20 Stretchy, pliable (7)
- 21 Squeamish (6)
- 22 Counting tool using beads (6)
- 24 Female relation (6)
- 26 Manoeuvre to reverse direction (1,4)



Answers to June 15 Crossword #33

SERENADE WHITES
E E O Y I A R T
CASSOCK MASSIVE
R E N E M S C R
EGRETS WELTOD
T V I R E R I
SEGMENTS ENID
B E I E I S
AWLS CUDDLING
C U A O L O S
KILOWATT QUENCH
D L H I O S P A
REALIGN CHILLED
O B L E T O U E
PAYEES SOANDSOS

Answers to July 1 Crossword #34

SKIMP CLAW BALE
A T R R U S G D
I M A G I N E G E N T I L E
L L S S U I T N
F I L M S T A R F R A U D
T E E T T
M A S T O I D D A E M O N S
A R R A
N U P T I A L A R S E N I C
L G O L A K
S W A M I D E B O N A I R
C C N G E A V S
U N A W A R E R E T R E A T
F R L R T A L L I
F A D E A S I A L A Y E R

OUR APOLOGIES

► Last issue the answers for puzzle 33 did not appear. Here are the answers to 33 and 34. Puzzle 35 answers will be published in the August 01 issue of *Our Voice*.

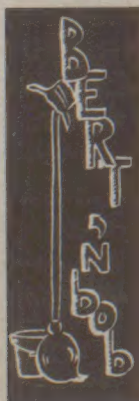
SOUPLINE BOB



OVERKILL



39A YOUNG



Families that struggle to get by

BY RON MURDOCH

Much has been said about welfare reforms in Alberta, Ontario and other provinces. Some people have applauded, while others have used graphic descriptions for the reforms. It all depends on where you are on the economic scale. The working poor have to watch every nickel and dime, trying to raise a family and make ends meet, hoping that the end of the month bills don't climb faster than the monthly income.

Myself, I can remember one tough winter in 1986. I worked at a gas station in Saskatoon, I worked part-time at \$4.50 an hour, which meant about \$300 a month. I was getting less than I would have on welfare. \$180 went for rent, leaving \$30 a week to forage for food at Safeway and with the specials at Shoppers Drug Mart. Not much was left for entertainment. A treat was the \$3.50 lasagna/coffee special at the nearby Ninos on a Sunday evening. Taking a city bus was out of the question. I went everywhere on foot, even when it got cold, no matter what the wind chill.

After three months of hacking it, I dumped the gas station job and did odd jobs for four months. Things got marginally better, but it was either feast or famine. By June of 1997 I was looking for something better and headed for Vancouver, where I found full time work almost immediately, enjoyed warmer winters, and had many more options in life with better pay.

Now I find myself back in Saskatoon, selling **Our Voice**. Life can be tough. And not just for me. Following are two stories about families who are working hard to just stay ahead.

Grin and bear it

Lawrenceo makes about \$1400 a month in his home maintenance job, and it all goes for low cost housing and support for his wife and two teenaged sons. His last pay raise was several years ago, and he says taxes would gobble up any pay increase. His work pays his gas bills for his car which he has to use, but it doesn't nearly cover the cost of running the vehicle. If it breaks down on the job, Lawrenceo has to pay the whole bill, and to make matters worse, his pay is docked for the down time while his car is getting fixed.



Edie Megysi is a single mother of two boys and she has a job packaging spices, oatmeal, popcorn packs, cake mixes and other miscellaneous items at the Saskatchewan Abilities Council. The pay is not good. Edie only makes \$51 more a month than she would on welfare. There's only one other 'perk', a monthly bus pass.

Things are tight in the Megysi household. From mid-month on, food can get scarce. When her two youngsters, 6 and 10, start to ask for more to eat, Edie feels humiliated, to the point of tears. She can't give her sons all they need. She gets to the food bank sometimes, but it's hard to find the time to go, wait there, make the bus connections and haul the food.

Entertainment for Edie and her boys is limited. Staying home and creatively finding fun things for Adrian and Eddie to do is the norm. Edie relies a lot on her spiritual beliefs to get through the current lean times. With the help of God's grace Edie hopes to find a man who can financially support her and her two sons. She doesn't want to start a serious relationship

with a man in the same working poor class.

Edie can see why government would be cutting back in welfare reform, but she feels government should look in the mirror first, before slashing.

Lawrenceo thinks current welfare reforms should be flushed down the toilet. His concern is that reforms will affect people who are really looking for work or trying to improve themselves with school or upgrading. Reforms should target the abusers of the system, he feels. In some cases people on welfare are better off than the working poor. Their rent gets paid and dental and medical coverage is included. Lawrenceo has dental coverage, but he has to pay the first 75% of the bill before getting compensated. On the other hand he sees welfare recipients ending up in inadequate housing, right alongside the working poor people.

Lawrenceo expects more of the same from life in the near future. He does not look for leadership from the upper class, multi-national corporations or government, but looks for ideas to get out of his current mess from a Loving Creator. Lawrenceo cannot expect anything from the authorities from the way they've handled his two sons. Both have spent time in foster homes and he thinks the homes are not more than money-making rackets.

Apart from his church life, Lawrenceo sees total disaster. Extras like restaurant meals and coffee are out of the question. His wife makes regular trips to the food bank to help out with food supplies. For the time being Lawrenceo grins and bears it and tries not to get overly pessimistic. ♦

Ron Murdoch is an **Our Voice** vendor in Saskatoon.

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